

THE RETURN

BY MAY SINCLAIR

IT was after his success that it attacked him, that poignant and profound nostalgia.

Except for the first Christmas, he hadn't gone home once in all the five years of his struggle. He felt, I suppose, that he'd got to vindicate himself, and he shrank from presenting his people, periodically, with a failure. He'd put them up at his rooms and entertain them when they descended on him from their rectory, every year at the May meetings, so that they'd kept in touch. But as for going down—no. I imagine there was more in it than that proud reluctance; there was, I think, downright fear; there'd been some iron in his life which had entered into his soul. At any rate, the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, where he'd worked those five years, didn't give him so many and so long holidays that he could afford to waste any of them on Market Welborne. And there were his three years in the Paris branch, when he wouldn't leave France for one day because of her fascination and his passion.

Perhaps if it hadn't been for Paris, for France, we shouldn't have had the Gerald Marriott that we know, the peculiar mixture of profane satirist and exquisite, passionate poet, the master of *vers libre*. If it hadn't been for France he might never have felt that sudden homesickness, that irresistible longing to return. It was made up of memories, thick, clinging memories, mystic, inscrutable memories, memories drenched with emotion—memories of smells; of subtle, penetrating, indestructible smells; of mildew in the parish church; of camphor in his mother's gown; of his sister Sylvia's hair (he said

it smelled of Brazil nuts); of a hot patch in the kitchen garden where the black currants had a throbbing, spicy tang like a mulled wine; of a certain flower he didn't know the name of, a small, indigo-blue flower, a cluster of tight bells like a minute hyacinth, each bell giving out a prodigious, concentrated smell of honey and peaches. When he thought of this nameless flower, Gerald would close his eyes and sniff. "I can smell it now, Simpson," he'd say.

And he had visions of a white hill road curving through crimson heather; of a green field he could see from his bedroom window, a small, fan-shaped field with an ash tree in the top corner; and of the lawn in front of the rectory with the black shadow of a cedar sprawling across it, and the little points and bays in the shadow. He said it made him feel sick and giddy to think of them. It was as if his soul had been disintegrated and bits of it left all about that country, sticking to those objects and those smells. He wanted to gather himself together in one supreme encounter. He wanted to go down and see it and smell it all again.

And, more than anything, he wanted to see his people and be seen, to show them his real self, Gerald Thompson-Marriott (only he had dropped the Thompson), the poet of the *New Poems*. He had given every member of his family a copy; to his father and mother one each of the limited signed edition, printed on Japanese vellum and bound in white leather; to the others his second-best brand, printed on hand-made paper. Then there were the reviews. I ought to tell you that the *Spectator* had led off with a poisonous attack which

convulsed us with laughter and made poor Gerald miserable for the solitary reason that his people "took" the *Spectator* and were bound to see it. He accused the editor of deliberate malignity in getting in first. And he had taken care to send down the *New Review* with Grevill Burton's long article that placed him at the head and front of modern European poets, and the *Mercure de France* with Jules le Breton's article that kept him there, and the *Times Literary Supplement* with Furnival's review. But he couldn't rest till he had gone down himself. He wanted to judge of the impression he had made; he wanted to *hear* them congratulating him. He couldn't get the full intoxication of his success until he had seen them flushed with it. That they would be flushed, that they would be fairly reeling under it, we hadn't a doubt. When you think of that obscure family, the Thompson-Marriots, buried in their Dartmoor village and raised suddenly, by Gerald, to an immortality—

All this, mind you, was in the days of Mona Richards. You'll admit that Gerald's nostalgia must have been overpowering if it could drag him from Mona, even for a week end, in the first violence of their affair.

I think it was by way of enforcing the impression that he took us down with him. We could say things about him he couldn't say himself.

The rectory was hospitable, and we inferred the depth of Gerald's impact by the warmth of the invitation it extended to Furnival and me.

You couldn't have had a doubt if you'd seen them standing in the porch, diverting Gerry from his rapt contemplation of the cedar. There were four of them—the rector and Gerry's mother, and his sisters, Dorothy, and Sylvia—the one whose hair smelled of Brazil nuts. And presently a fifth appeared, Gerry's elder brother, Herbert. He strolled up on tiptoe with an air of affected indifference. And you had the whole bunch.

Oh yes, I can tell you what they were like. Gerry's father was small and lean and hard, with a hawkish keenness that had somehow wrested a slender Gerald from his mother's full-blown plumpness. He met us with a tight, bony handshake and a sort of thin, fluctuating smile that he pinched and twisted back into dignified austerity. Of Gerry's mother you can only say that she was buoyant; she floated toward you, bobbed round you like an ecstatic balloon, exuding cheerfulness. Herbert was a blond youth, not yet full blown, though an incipient buoyancy betrayed itself in his tiptoeing. He achieved earnestness with a gold-framed pince-nez. The girls had taken a mid-line between both parents—little, high-pitched, paternal noses, oval curves that would some day be globular, so that Gerald startled you with his singular, delicate distinction.

I can't recall very clearly the first half hour. The rector disappeared very soon into his study, and I've an impression of a drawing-room, of amber curtains, of sky-blue porcelain and gilt, of florid furniture, and of Gerald, standing apart in the French window, looking at his cedar; then of Herbert tiptoeing up to him and talking in brief, unrelated sentences. He had the air of entertaining, politely and under great strain, a tiresome outsider.

I looked about for a sight of Gerald's *Poems*, and at last I discovered them on an obscure table, the white line of their vellum compressed by a concealing slab of *Church Family Magazines*; and Furnival says he came on the *New Review* and the *Mercure* hidden under the *Spectator*. Later on we found that, however the parlor maid rearranged that table, the *Church Family Magazines* and the *Spectator* worked up again to the top.

So far none of them had said a word about Gerald's poems.

I thought, "Dear British people, they're so bursting with pride in him that they're afraid to show it."

At half past four a bell rang and we all went into the dining room for tea.

The tea—well, when I remember that tea I am inclined to think tenderly of Mrs. Thompson-Marriott. It was all home-made cakes and shrimp-paste sandwiches and Devonshire cream and jam. And the kind lady seemed to regard us as shipwrecked travelers, as inhabitants of a besieged city of London who hadn't seen a square or any other meal for months, and must be fed instantly. There was a second when, preoccupied with Gerald and his poems, I wondered whether this bustling anxiety of hers was not an affectation, a device for staving off the still more sumptuous moment, keeping us a little longer from the burning subject. For I still felt that it burned, that it *must* be burning, and that only the restraint of Furnival's presence and mine prevented it from breaking out in full blaze.

Then, when our plates were piled, Mrs. Thompson-Marriott began to talk to us.

I wish I could reproduce her conversation. She had a robust and bracing tone for her son Gerald, and for Furnival and me a tone of encouragement, as if we were shy and humble persons who would find ourselves embarrassed. I suppose this was a manner acquired through too much district visiting, but it was amazing how she kept it up.

"Now mind you eat a good tea, all of you. Are you interested in poultry, Mr. Simpson? Gerry, your father took the second prize this year with his roses and the first prize again with his Wyandottes. My husband goes in for rose growing and poultry farming, Mr. Furnival. . . . Two lumps or three lumps? . . . If you'd been at our harvest festival you'd have seen the biggest vegetable marrow in the county, and it was grown in the rectory garden. . . . Cream? . . . We had it photographed. Dorsy dear, run and fetch the photo of the vegetable marrow; it's in the top left-hand drawer of daddy's writing table—No, darling, *don't*. Daddy's finishing his sermon. My husband always preaches extempore, but he prepares each sermon

as carefully as if it was written out. Polishing. You'd think it would be lost on our little humble congregation, but he believes in giving them his best. Always the best. That's your father's motto, Gerry."

She poured it out to a gentle tinkling of teacups, with conscientious pauses and ponderings over the tilted cream jug, lest inadvertently she should give us too little. And then on:

"I think that's why my husband succeeds in everything he undertakes. Preaching or poultry, put your heart and soul into it, he says, and *don't spare the brains*. That's the secret. Isn't it, Gerry?"

"I suppose it is," said Gerald, miserably. He had shrunk up and squeezed himself into the likeness of a dismal failure, a white worm. I'd seen it growing on him since our arrival, his vague, depressed humility. You felt that it was this maternal cheerfulness, playing on him from his birth, that had made Gerry a pessimist.

At this point—rather late—the rector came in for his tea, and we all went on sitting round the table till he had finished. The dear man was as much absorbed in the meal as Mrs. Thompson-Marriott could have wished him to be, but now and then he emerged to give her information as to what had happened in the parish. Thus: that Mrs. Lobb had sent in her name for the Coal and Blanket Club; that old Bole's bronchitis seemed a trifle better this morning; that Darke had complained of missing another of his ferrets and suspected Master Dicky Gosling, and that if the young rascal called for his mother's beef tea he was to be detained. Also he wished to be reminded to send Coulson those proofs for the magazine.

And through it all Herbert seemed to be trying to get his word in about something. I noticed that he fixed on Furnival a peculiar, fascinated, avid stare. It turned out afterward that Gerald had told him Furny wrote the poetry reviews for the *Times*. Only one couldn't imag-

ine what interest he could have for Herbert, since, clearly, Herbert wasn't a bit interested in his brother.

We had now been in the house two hours and nothing had been said about Gerald's poems. But as we crossed the hall to the drawing-room after tea, the rector drew him into the obscure den which, from a vision of bookcases and a roll-top desk, you took to be his study. I felt sure that in there, where he had him to himself, and modest reserve was no longer imposed on either of them, Gerry's father, with a dry, thin smile, perhaps, and a grave hand on his shoulder, would congratulate his son. There had been barriers, you could see, between them; but a stunning success like Gerry's must have broken them down. I didn't suppose he would ever realize entirely what his son was, but he couldn't, he simply couldn't not congratulate him.

In the drawing-room Herbert possessed himself of Furnival, and Mrs. Thompson-Marriott of me. I could see her looking at them and smiling at their communion. She told me she wanted Herbert to meet dear Gerald's friends who had done so much for him. Herbert was tutor to dear Lord Welborne's boys. Keble was his college. It might not have the charm of the older colleges, she said, but its tone was much more earnest. That was why his father had chosen it for Herbert. "We are very proud of Herbert," she said. "He has great literary talent, and we feel that some day he will do something."

It seemed to me that she was giving me an opening, you might even say a lead, if it wasn't a positive invitation to say something nice about Gerald. When he had come to them in the first flush of his success, when they must all have been simply tingling with their sense of it, and when he had brought us down as responsible witnesses, it would have looked odd if one of us hadn't said something; and as Furny (with the flare of his *Times* article beating on him) was compelled to reticence, it had to be me.

So I said she must be delighted with Gerald's success.

"Oh, well," she said, "*he's* had every opportunity. But then *all* my children do something— My eldest daughter, Dorothy, is taking up music, and my youngest, Sylvia, paints. . . . It might have been a little difficult for them, but, mercifully, they have a very broad-minded and tolerant father. All our children are very dear to us, Mr. Simpson, and we don't want them to feel that there's anything narrow and cramping in their lives." She turned to Furnival. "I understand, Mr. Furnival, that you paint."

Furny said, No; it was Mr. Simpson who did that.

She smiled and said: "We must get Sylvia to show Mr. Simpson some of her drawings. Sylvie dear—"

And Sylvia, without further prompting, produced a portfolio from the music rack.

The drawings? Oh, well, such things *are* done and I don't know whether you would consider Sylvia altogether responsible. I supposed they expected me to say something, but, as it happened, that wasn't necessary. Sylvia thrust the things under my nose with a calm, contemptuous haughtiness that took my breath away, and as her mother pointed out the unique merits of each specimen: "Sylvia's line is always very bold and free. So lifelike. Wonderful, her eye for color. You wouldn't think it was the work of quite a young girl," I'd nothing to do but murmur, "Really!" "Indeed!" "Is that so?" at intervals, till we got to the last one, and Sylvia, with a supremely arrogant gesture, removed the portfolio.

Sylvia's drawings carried us on to dinner time. (Mrs. Thompson-Marriott was very anxious that Gerald should eat a good dinner; she said he looked half starved.) And after dinner Dorothy played to us till bedtime. They had made Sylvia sleep with Dorothy so that I might have her bedroom. After parting from his father on the door mat, Gerald came to me there.

I thought he'd come to tell me what he'd said, but instead of doing that he complained that they'd tampered with the ceiling in his room. "It used to look like the map of Russia." He remembered a long, sinuous crack that was the Volga.

"Has he said anything?" I asked.

Gerald came down from his ceiling and began looking round the room.

"No," he said, "he hasn't."

"What on earth did you talk about?"

"We talked about the bank and about the by-elections, and Keble, and what Herbert was doing, and Dorsy's music lessons. Oh, and about his roses, and he showed me the photograph of the vegetable marrow. He's going to show us the Wyandottes to-morrow."

"Did you congratulate him?"

"Of course I did."

He had opened the cupboard door and gone into it and stood there among Sylvia's frocks hanging. His voice came out muffled and queer.

"We used to play hide and seek in this cupboard when we were kids," he said. "And it's got the same smell." He sniffed. "Of—of warm wood and—hair brushes."

We were waked very early on Sunday morning by the krerk-er-erking of the Wyandottes. Gerry said we needn't go to church unless we liked, but he was going for the smell. Church—the smell was everything he said it was—church took up nearly the whole of the morning, and when it was over we filled in the time till early dinner by looking at the Wyandottes. After dinner we managed to get away with Gerald on his white road across the moor. That brought us to tea time. We had now been twenty-four hours in the place and nobody had congratulated Gerald.

After tea he went off by himself to look for a stone—a jolly old stone he knew—in a stream at the bottom of the garden. It was then that the rector called me into his study.

There I found—at last—Gerald's *Poems* laid out conspicuously on a little

table by the rector's armchair. He sat down and began drumming with his fingers on the cover. Now, I thought, we're coming to it.

"Can you give me any idea, Mr. Simpson, of the cost of all this?"

"The cost?" I said. I wasn't prepared for that.

"Well, the approximate cost."

"Does it—does it matter?" I said.

"Yes, my dear Mr. Simpson, it matters very much. I dare say you know the state of Gerald's finances—"

I let him go on. I wasn't going to tell him yet. You see, the little vellum-covered book was placed there, not as an honored decoration, but as a *pièce justificative*.

He went on, as I meant he should, and I could see by his peculiar, thin, shrewd smile that he was enjoying himself. "I am ignorant of such things, but it seems to me that Gerald has been insanely, criminally, extravagant. I understand that Japanese vellum is the most expensive thing he could have chosen. And why hand-made paper? Is no other good enough for him? . . . It might be all very well as the hobby of a millionaire, but for a bank clerk earning what Gerald earns—"

It was at this point that I interfered.

"But you don't imagine, sir, that Gerald brings out his poems at his own expense?"

"At whose, then?" He asked it sternly.

"Why, at his publishers', of course."

"His—publishers'? You don't mean to tell me—"

I went on telling him, and as he took it in I watched his shrewd smile flickering out and a flush—yes, a flush of vexation—creeping up to the roots of his hair. You see, he didn't want to know about Gerald's publishers. He would have preferred him to have brought out his poems at his own expense, so that he might have been justified in his attitude. He had made up his mind that Gerald was no good, and he didn't like to have his judgment upset in this way. He

didn't like Gerald publishing at all; I believe he'd even have been glad if he'd ruined himself with the expense, so that he might be put off doing it again.

I rubbed it in hard. I told him that his son's position was assured; that he had a European reputation which could only increase with time. I saw the little vexed pulses beating in his flush.

"Well," he said, "you surprise me. I shouldn't have thought— But of course I'm—I'm very glad to hear it."

He looked at me steadily, hypnotically. It was clear that, after my hearing him tell that awful whopper, he could only want me to go. And I went.

Meanwhile a horrible thing had happened to Furnival. Mrs. Thompson-Marriott had him in the drawing-room. Gerry was there; he had found his stone and come back again. His mother had made a pause in the conversation—on purpose—and had handed Furnival a book.

"Have you seen this, Mr. Furnival? *A Churchman's Day - Book*, by my brother, the Dean of Worcester? I think the first one ought to be read by every artist and writer. 'Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely' . . . The dean had his text in Greek. She ran her finger along under it, so that she seemed to be translating. "'Whatsoever things are of good report—'"

Here, I must say, the white worm, Gerry, turned.

"Don't stuff it down his throat, mater. It isn't in Furny's line, you know."

"It's the beautiful English, Mr. Furnival. I'm sure that will appeal to you. . . . I think, Gerry, when the *Spectator* says they're models of scholarly prose style—"

"Did it?" Gerry said. "That'll buck him up no end, poor old thing. Wasn't he frightfully pleased?"

"If he was, he had the good taste not to show it, my dear. I think," she said, "the reviews in the *Spectator* are always so very fair and honest."

Furny says he knew then she'd seen it, the *Spectator's* review of Gerald's

poems. He knew she meant Gerald to see that she'd seen it.

So Furny cut in. Talking of reviews, he said, she must have been immensely pleased with Grevill Burton's article in the *New Review*.

"Who is this Grevill Burton? Anybody I know, Gerry?"

"You ought to," Gerry said, almost savagely. "He's—"

The poor chap stopped short. Furny says his jaw positively dropped on it, in the hopelessness of trying to make her see what Grevill Burton was, what *he* was.

And she laughed, with that dreadful, shrewd gayety of hers. "I'm sure he is, my dear."

It was wonderful the implications she contrived to pack into it—that if Grevill Burton was a friend of Gerry's—that Gerry thought every goose that praised him was a swan; that Grevill Burton and Gerry, insignificant obscurities, maintained themselves by grinding each other's axes; and that Gerry was a fool if he supposed that anybody in Market Welborne would be taken in by either of them.

Furnival's blood was up then and he let her have it. He told her that Burton was a novelist of European reputation, and one of the few European critics whose opinion counted. She blinked, and he thought he'd really crushed her with that one word, "European"; but all she said was, "If that's so, it's a strange thing we've never heard of him."

Furnival had done his best and Gerald told him afterward that it was awfully decent of him to try, but it wasn't any good. If his mother had once got an idea in her head you couldn't get it out, and if it wasn't there you couldn't get it in. The only result was that Furnival lost the little prestige his *Times* job had conferred on him. He was just one of them, Gerry's swans that were palpable geese. It was to me she attached herself for the rest of the afternoon.

We were walking in the garden, the really very lovely garden, golden with autumn. When I say "walking" I mean that Gerry's mother (in a purple sports coat) gave an impression of floating by my side, buoyed up with plumpness and bobbing airily, like a captive balloon.

"I want to talk to you about dear Gerry," she said.

I said, "Yes," for I thought it was about time she began to show some interest in him.

"We're very uneasy about him, my husband and I."

"Why?" I said. "Why?"

"Because—Gerry's a dear boy, but he's *not* like the others. He has always gone his own way. He has always isolated himself from Us and from his Home, and we feel that the poor boy's making—well, a grand mistake."

"But, Mrs. Marriott," I said, "don't you realize how *good* he is?"

"Good? Yes. There isn't a better boy than dear Gerry. He's never forgotten what we've taught him; I'm not afraid of his failing *morally*, Mr. Simpson."

Morally. I can't convey the conviction of her stress. I thought of Mona. I thought of one or two pre-Mona and Parisian episodes. If only the poor lady had known.

"It's this writing."

I didn't say anything. I wanted to give her her opening, to make room for her, to watch her developing her theme.

She must have felt my inward protest. "Oh yes," she said. "I know he tries, poor boy. He works hard enough. But what is it when it's done? He can't rhyme one word with another. And the lines don't scan properly. I understand, because my other son, Herbert, *does* write poetry. Very beautiful poetry. He says poor Gerry doesn't know what he's trying to do. He's no idea of what he wants to say, if he *has* anything to say. He's so obscure, Mr. Simpson. I do think that the first duty of any writer

is to be clear—to write so that he can be understood."

I still said nothing, and she went on:

"I think if you belonged, as I do, to a literary family, you'd see what I mean."

I said I did see what she meant, but that I entirely differed from her. I said that clearness was a relative thing, but that, to my mind, every line that Gerald had written had the clearness, not of crystal—crystal, if it had any thickness, wasn't clear—but of fine glass or of pure, dry air. There was, I said, absolutely nothing between Gerald and his perception, his emotion. Poetry could not be more utterly direct. All this I said, not to the heated mass of blubber in the purple sports coat that rolled beside me, but to some invisible, divine auditor. I didn't care whether Mrs. Thompson-Marriott understood me or not. If anything, I'd rather she didn't understand me. My satisfaction lay in knowing that what I said annoyed her.

For you could see what was the matter with her, what was the matter with them all. She resented, she must always have resented, Gerry's claim—she would conceive it as a claim—to be, among them, the unique exception. She wanted us to see that it was Gerry's family that was exceptional, and that it drew all its talent from her side. Positively I think she regarded his success as an outrage to Herbert and Dorothy and Sylvia and the Dean of Welchester and herself. I don't profess to have seen through all her motives, but I think she felt that by refusing to recognize him she paid him out for *not* being like the others, for going his own way, and for isolating himself from Us and from his Home.

Still, I doubt whether, even then, she took it in. She was one of those happy people who cannot see what they don't want to see. And as we went toward the house she returned.

"There is one thing I must beg of you, dear Mr. Simpson, and of Mr. Furnival—not to unsettle Gerry. You know he is dependent on what he earns. We

feel that all this premature, exaggerated praise is very bad for him. It may make him throw up his appointment."

I said I hoped it would. That was the best thing he could do. It was, in fact, though I didn't tell her so, the thing that Gerry proposed to do. And she said she was afraid I was as foolish as dear Gerald. She supposed he could make me think anything he liked. He had a way with him. It was clear that she saw in Furnival and me two well-meaning, but misguided, young men who had surrendered to Gerry's personal fascination.

Don't imagine, though, that she had done with us. None of us, not even Gerald, had the faintest idea of what that woman had in reserve. We only staved it off by a long walk that tided us over another period of church and lasted till supper time. It was after supper that it happened—in the rector's study.

I dare say it was a put-up job between Herbert and his mother. I certainly saw him come downstairs with the thing in his hand, and as we went in I certainly saw her take it from him and lock it up in a drawer in the bureau. She wanted us to think that it had been there all the time, that Herbert had had no hand in what followed. Herbert and the girls didn't come into the study. We were all innocently seated, Gerald and Furnival and I, before the fireplace. The rector had put a light to the fire, for the evening was chilly. He and Mrs. Thompson-Marriott were resting in armchairs drawn up close together, and in attitudes of utter innocence, when suddenly she said to him:

"You know, dearest, what you said I should do. Shall I? Do you think—now?"

And he said, "Now, by all means."

She got up and went to the bureau and unlocked the drawer and took out of it the MS. she had just put there. She floated back to us, smiling with a sort of sugary assurance.

"I am going to read to you," she said,

"a little poem of my son Herbert's. I want you to see—"

Her meaning expanded with her sweet, wise smile.

The rector closed his eyes and fitted the fingertips of his right hand to the fingertips of his left. His face had a look of intense, happy expectation.

She began a little tremulously:

"ROSES AND SHADOWS"

"Where is the place I came from long ago?"

Her voice was like a clear, thick syrup poured out slowly. When she stressed a line we saw her little, bright, eyes bending up at us over the edge of the paper, to meet our recognition of the genuine gift; of the real thing, of the poetry that *was* poetry, we who had run so after the counterfeit; her idea being that if we were to do for Herbert, now, what we had done for Gerald—

Was it any good? O Lord! no. The putrid thing cried to heaven.

I think you must have it.

Where is the place I came from long ago?

God's garden lying toward the happy west,

Where all the roses of enchantment grow,

Where on green lawns the cedar shadows rest.

There my young dreams went questing to and fro,

Roses and shadows of the long ago.

Oh, Childhood's Place! Oh, Home of long ago!

If I could find your garden in the west,
There would I call my wandering dreams to know

Peace of wings folded in a quiet nest,
Nor find you gone where rose and shadow go,
Roses and shadows of the long ago.

When she said "Home of long ago," she put her hand on her husband's knee and he covered it with his. And when she got to the last "roses and shadows" her voice trembled away into the awful silence we made. It was an inexpressibly painful moment. We daren't look at one another. Gerald, mercifully, had

hidden his face in his hands, which was the best thing he could do with it.

But it ended. Furnival saved us with a low groan he had contrived. He made it sound like an inarticulate emotion.

And Mrs. Thompson-Marriott's voice was going on again. "It may not be great poetry," it said, "but I think it is sweet and musical."

"Very sweet. Very musical," the rector said. And then, "What do you say, Gerald?"

Gerald got up and went to the window, and stood there as if he were looking for his cedar in the dark. His mother pretended not to notice him. "The little poem shows, I think, that the dear boy loves his home. It's very gratifying to his father and mother."

We said it must be very gratifying indeed.

That night we went to Gerald in his room.

"Look here," he said; "they want me to stop on another week, but I daren't. It's awful the effect the place has on you. I don't feel as if I was myself. I don't feel real. . . . I'm not real—not in the way Herbert is. I'm not Gerald Marriott. I—I'm Master Gerry, the miserable little slobbering, shivering wretch they hunted and hounded. As long as I stick here I shall never be anything else," he said. "I shall shiver and slobber. . . . I'd better go up with you, before—I suppose you know what I brought you down for?"

We didn't. He said he did it so that he should remember that, after all, he was Himself.

"But, Gerry," I said, "you were disgustingly homesick. You were dying to go back."

"I didn't know," he said, "how far back I should go." Then he broke out: "I want Mona. God! how I want her! I know *she's* real."

Well, he went back to town with us the next day. I shall see him forever as he stood on the platform at Waterloo, carrying a basket of apples and a basket of plums and embracing a vegetable marrow. He still kept his strange, tractable humility.

"I think," he said, "I can manage the apples and plums, Simpson, if you'll take the vegetable marrow."

The sense of unreality clung to him all the way to Chelsea. I don't think he was sure of himself, of his maturity, till he saw Mona get up from her cushions in the corner and come toward him, with that throbbing light in her eyes and that little thick laugh of hers—gay and sensual and tender.

As it turned out, Gerald thought it was all my fault that his mother had read Herbert's poem to us.

"You must have done something," he said, "to make her do it. And the worst of it is they think I'm jealous of him."

He's wrong. The worst of it is that I can't get Herbert's poem out of my head. It sticks like treacle.